Fulbright Presses Laird On Soviet Missiles Issue

By the Associated Press

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee wants Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to substantiate his assertion the Soviet Union is working toward a nuclear first-strike capability.

The committee has a month-old report from its staff saying U.S. intelligence sources dispute the Pentagon chief's March 21 testimony that the Russians are striving toward such a capability.

Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright, D-Ark., and others feel Laird's testimony was calculated to reduce opposition to the administration's Safeguard antimissile system.

Fulbright is negotiating with Laird on the timing of the latter's appearance, expected next week, and whether the Pentagon chief will testify in open or closed session.

The committee also is asking Secretary of State William P. Rogers to outline before it every phase of U.S.-Soviet relations concerning the forthcoming nuclear arms limitation talks.

Both appearances are linked to a committee majority's opposition to ABM deployment.

The committee put aside the staff report yesterday in favor of getting an actual assessment from Laird of the latest intelligence. It wants to know if the month-old figures, based primarily on intelligence estimates made last December, have changed.

Laird told the House Armed Services committee May 22 that the Russians are expected to have 400 large SS9 missiles operational by the mid-1970s. He said there was concern the Russians would install multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRV) on the SS.9 A MIRV missile would be capable of hitting several selected targets simultaneously and is considered a great threat to land-based U.S. missiles.

The staff report, compiled in part from information furnished the committee by Richard Helms, Central Intelligence Agency director, says the rate of Soviet SS9 deployment had decreased in the last two years. It said that launchers pinpointed since Nov. 1968 had represented less than a 3 percent increase in deployment.